

The Finnish law on textile waste separate collection and implementation pilots

[978/2021 Waste Decree](#), pursuant to the decision of the Government, under the [Waste Act \(646/2011\)](#)

EU law stipulates that the member states shall set up a separate collection for textiles by January 2025. Finland is leading the way and passed a law in 2021 that requires municipalities to separately collect textiles already from January 2023. Like other municipal waste, textiles from households fall under the responsibility of municipalities; some of the municipal waste managers in Finland have piloted and put in place a system for separate collection. The Helsinki Region Environmental Services (HSY) started collection pilots in 2019, testing different collection methods and developing the collection point network ever since.

FINLAND

Level: National

Key facts about the law: No later than January 1st 2023, municipalities must arrange for a sufficient number of regional reception points for textile waste. Separately collected waste must be delivered to processing, whereas much of it as possible is prepared for reuse or mechanical recycling of the highest possible quality. The law also stipulates separate collection for businesses producing textile waste.

IMPLEMENTATION IN THE GREATER HELSINKI AREA

In the Helsinki region, the largest metropolitan area in Finland with a population of over one million, the average person produced 3.11 kg of textile waste in 2021. HSY has introduced a system for the collection and treatment of this waste: clothing and textiles that are in good condition and suitable for reuse, as well as end-of-life textiles for recycling, are collected at Sortti Stations since 2019 - subject to a charge. Since 2022, collection of end-of-life textiles expanded when HSY launched a free collection trial in ten shopping centres. Textiles such as dry clothing and other household textiles are collected in plastic bags to prevent them from getting dirty or wet during transportation. The two collection systems deliver very different outcomes: the pay-and-declare system at the Sortti services has a significantly lower recycling rate (after pre-sorting: 16% is reused as clothes; 21% reused as material; 63% ends up in waste fraction) in comparison to the free shopping centre collection (after pre-sorting: 3% is reused as clothes, 60% reused as material, 37% ends up in waste fraction). The lower yield is mainly due to contamination with dirt and moisture at Sortti Stations and this kind of collection will therefore end in 2023. According to HSY, also other municipalities already collect textiles separately and the system is ready for the obligations as of 2023.

IMPLEMENTATION IN GREATER HELSINKI AREA - CONTINUED

The collected end-of-life textiles are first pre-sorted at the Kivikko waste service centre, a service provided by a company based on public tender. After that, the textile waste is subject to a quality check and subsequently sorted according to fibre and recyclable material and sent to the [Lounais-Suomen Jätehuolto Oy](#) (LSJH) recycling plant in Turku for further sorting and processing. The companies running the plants claim that 'recycled fibre can be made into yarn, non-woven textiles, insulation, acoustic panels and filtration fabrics, as well as composites' ([see website](#)). LSJH mechanically processes end-of-life textiles into recycled fibre and is part of the Telaketju project, a public-private partnership project of the Ministry of Economic Affairs and Employment. Since spring 2016, the Telaketju project is a cooperation network that forwards textile recycling and enables the development of business models related to the circular economy. In addition to this, the Telavalue project by Business Finland, consisting of a public research project and six company projects, has been changing the Finnish textile treatment scene. It has an employment enabling component and seeks to create new business opportunities in Finland by utilising waste textiles.

Since the Finnish waste law prioritises reuse over recycling, vintage clothing stores also benefit from the system. 'Charity organizations such as Helsinki Metropolitan Area Reuse Centre Ltd collect textiles as donations. At [UFF](#) [a charity that collects textiles across the country and uses the profits to develop projects in the Global South], 95,5% of the textile donations were being reused or used as material in 2020. About 80% of the textiles went to wholesalers in Finland, the Baltic Countries, Russia, and Asia', states the [Finnish-Russian Chamber of Commerce](#).



In Finland, about [40.000 tonnes of used textiles ended up in mixed waste in 2019](#) and about 61% of all used textiles were incinerated.



The [new recycling plant](#) can process about 10% of Finnish end-of-life textiles per year.

OBJECTIVES

The immense waste of resources from incinerating textiles, as well as the huge environmental impacts of the industry and the EU legal framework, were strong incentives for the law and the pilot projects. Finland can also boost its local economy with this textile scheme and create jobs in the sorting, reuse, and recycling sectors.

CHALLENGES

Helsinki will have eleven collection points by 2023 but would need even more to collect additional textile waste. The waste management company HSY is hesitant to expand the infrastructure because of the costs involved and the possible introduction of Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR) scheme under national and EU law. The levels of contamination in collected textile waste also pose a challenge to the system. In addition, material is lost in the sorting process due to missorting. The quality audit charges the sorting company in case of poor sorting - this leads to sorters classifying fewer textiles as recyclable if there is uncertainty. On the recycling side, given that the current system only recycles a fraction of the total textile waste, recycling capacity has to be increased - there are already plans for more recycling plants with the aim [‘to create enough capacity for Finland’s entire post-consumer end-of-life textile processing needs and ... \(and\) providing processing services for other areas in the Baltic Sea region.’](#) However, the market for recycled material is still very small and there are questions around the economic viability of the project.

LINK TO EU LEGISLATION

The EU Waste Framework Directive mandates all member states to establish a separate collection of used textiles by the year 2025, thus, Finland is a frontrunner in this transposition. The law also preempts the possibility that, under current EU law, the EU may consider setting targets for reuse and recycling of textile waste after 2024. The successful transposition of the existing law is also a driver for the implementation of the new [EU Textile Strategy](#). Published in March 2022, this strategy aims at tackling the negative impacts on water, energy consumption, and the environment due to increased consumption.

The 2020 Circular Economy Action Plan *‘identifies textiles as a key product value chain with an urgent need and a strong potential for the transition to sustainable and circular production, consumption and business models ... By 2030 textile products placed on the EU market are long-lived and recyclable, to a great extent made of recycled fibres, free of hazardous substances ... The circular textiles ecosystem is thriving, driven by sufficient capacities for innovative fibre-to-fibre recycling, while the incineration and landfilling of textiles is reduced to the minimum’* ([EU Textile Strategy](#)).

Depending on future EU legislation, Finland is also considering EPR schemes for textiles, which would put the onus for collecting and treating waste on textile producers.

For more good practices, check [Zero Waste Europe](#) and [Zero Waste Cities](#).

Zero Waste Europe, November 2022

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Zero Waste Europe is the European network of communities, local leaders, experts, and change agents working towards the prevention and elimination of waste in our society. We advocate for sustainable systems; for the redesign of our relationship with resources; and for a global shift towards environmental justice, accelerating a just transition towards zero waste for the benefit of people and the planet.



Zero Waste Europe gratefully acknowledges financial assistance from the European Union. The sole responsibility for the content of this material lies with Zero Waste Europe. It does not necessarily reflect the opinion of the funder mentioned above. The funder cannot be held responsible for any use that may be made of the information contained therein.